



ISSUE

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# Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF  
THE OL-  
SEN PARK  
CHURCH OF  
CHRIST

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

## Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

## Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

## Are We Too Rigid?

By David Banning

I had a young person ask me this question. I think I know what he meant. Like all of us he interacts with religious people who have a much broader view of how a person comes to God, worships God, and serves God—people who are far more accepting of divergent points of view. They seem so open and tolerant. And so, he is wondering, “Are we too rigid, too narrow in our approach to Scripture?” He’s also living in a world where moral barriers are collapsing, and people are increasingly tolerant of behavior that a few decades ago was aberrant. So, when he listens to our teaching about fornication, divorce, or homosexuality, he wonders, “Are we too strict?”

It’s an important question. It actually speaks to how we handle God’s instructions found in the Bible. How strictly should they be followed? Since doing God’s will is vital (Matt. 7:21), I think it’s worth the time to work through this question. Let me comment on four subjects that intersect with this question and along the way see if we can find an answer.

### The Pharisees

Many point to the Pharisees when they talk about the danger of being too strict. They believe this was their problem. They were just too meticulous about their obedience, too concerned about the details. They will point out that Jesus condemned them for this (Matt. 23:23a). Sometimes we are accused of being just like them . . . when we talk about the necessity of baptism or the limited circumstances under which one may divorce his or her spouse.

But those who use the Pharisees in this way have a problem. Jesus never condemned the Pharisees for being too meticulous about their obedience. Look carefully at this passage in Matthew 23. Jesus did not say that they were wrong for tithing their spices; He rebuked them for neglecting these other matters—justice, mercy, faithfulness (23:23). His problem was not with careful obedience, but with their disobedience. To label a person a “Pharisee” for trying to carefully follow God’s law demonstrates that we really don’t understand the problem with the Pharisees.

### **The Numbers**

Some assume that our approach to Scripture must be too strict simply because most other people are not

as strict as we are. This mindset trickles down to specific religious controversies. If most people are ambivalent about baptism, then maybe we should not be so concerned it. In a society enamored with polling data, it should not surprise us that many are tempted to believe that the crowd is always right.

But from a biblical perspective, this makes no sense at all. Being with the crowd was rarely the right place to be. Would you have wanted to be with the majority in Noah’s day? How many times in Israel’s history was the crowd pursuing pagan idolatry, while those faithful to God were just a small remnant of the nation? In the book of Revelation, most people were worshiping the emperor as a god. Only a small minority refused to do so. Remember also that Jesus said the broad way that most travel is the one that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14).

The number of people who believe something has nothing to do with whether or not it is true. The crowd is often wrong. So, in deciding how I will view any issue (or how I will approach Scripture generally), it is not safe to take our cue from the crowd. The crowd may be wrong; it often has been. Rather than trusting the crowd, we need to allow God to tell us how to approach His book. Which brings us to a third topic. . .

### **The Text**

Do we find any clues in Scripture about how strictly God wants us to follow His instructions? After all, I think we all can agree that we ought to be as careful with God’s instructions as He



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wants us to be. I think God does help us with this. In fact, when you start looking for it, hints are everywhere.

- Adam and Eve were punished for not following God’s instructions (Gen. 3).
- Cain’s sacrifice was unacceptable because he did not follow God’s instructions (Gen. 4).
- Noah was commended for doing ALL that God commanded (Gen. 6:22).
- Moses was commended for building the tabernacle exactly as God instructed (Exod. 40:16).
- Nadab and Abihu were consumed by fire because they offered strange fire **“which He had not commanded”** (Lev. 10:1-3).
- Moses said not to add to the word or take away from it (Deut. 4:2).
- Uzzah’s death was due in part to David’s failure to move the ark as God instructed (**“we did not seek Him according to the ordinance”**—1 Chron. 15:13).
- Nehemiah led the nation to observe the Feast of Tabernacles according to the ordinance (Neh. 8:18).
- The Corinthians were rebuked for not observing the Lord’s Supper in the right way (1 Cor. 11).
- Timothy was told to hold fast to the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13).
- Revelation warned not to add to or take away from what was written in the book (Rev. 22:18).

As I read these passages, a couple of questions come to mind. First, how many more passages like these could be added? Statements like this are found throughout Scripture. Second, can anyone read passages like these and come away believing that we can have a casual attitude about the law of God? How many times did the “details” matter? And doesn’t that just make sense? If the Creator decided to speak to a matter and put it in His book so people for all time would have HIS WORD on THIS ISSUE, does not that alone make it important? In fact, isn’t it arrogant to think we can go through the Creator’s words

and decide for ourselves what matters and what does not? If God speaks, it is important. I need to listen. Scripture demands this conclusion.

### The Implications

Consider one additional problem. If we decide we will not be so rigid with Scripture, then I wonder what we will say about some of these controversial issues.

***What will we say about baptism?*** Many have said that our insistence that people must be baptized to be saved is too rigid. My question is this: then what should we teach about baptism? When we teach Mark’s gospel and get to the end (16:16), what do we say about this passage? When we teach Acts and come to 2:38 or 22:16, what do we say about these passages? Do we avoid them? Do we deny what they clearly say? Do we say that it is really not important to do what God said to do here? When I read passages like these, I wonder: Is this really about being too rigid, or is it really about doing what God said?

***What do we say about divorce?*** Many say our teaching on divorce is too rigid.



But here's my question: what then do we teach about divorce? When we are working through Matthew's gospel in Bible class and we come to Matthew 19:9, what do we say about this verse? Do we pass over it? Do we tell people: "I know what it says, but you're still okay?" Is it too rigid to say that adultery is the only cause Jesus gave for divorcing my spouse; or are we just saying what Jesus said? For that matter. . .

***What are we to say about modesty?*** Start suggesting that disciples are wearing some things they should not wear and many would protest that we are being too strict (even some of our own brothers and sisters). But we are stuck with the same questions. When we are studying through the book of First Timothy and we get to 2:9-10, what do we say about these verses? Do we ignore them? Do

we mention the principles without discussing how they might speak to our behavior? When we take the virtues of modesty and discretion and couple them with Jesus's concern with men harboring lust in their hearts (Matt. 5:27-28), would this not have some impact on the kind of clothes we wear? Is this really about being too strict; or are we just trying to honor God in all our choices, including what we wear?

The real issue here is not with strictness; it's with sin. Lots of people do not want to hear what God says on these important issues. Our responsibility is not to back up and water down, but teach truth (2 Tim. 4:1-5). May God give us the courage to do so.

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